CHAPTER III

THE TIWAS (HILL AND PLAINS)

The Tiwas or the Lalungs constitute a scheduled tribe (plains) of Assam, belonging to the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic stock. A section of them, known as the Hill Lalungs, resides in the foothills and hilly areas of Karbi Anglong district. According to Gohain (1993: 98), the main point of difference between the two sections is that while the Tiwas residing in the plains are patrilineal, those residing in the hills are matrilineal. The Hill Lalungs were made eligible to be certified as a scheduled tribe for educational and other purposes only recently; but even now they have not been given the full status of a scheduled tribe in Karbi Anglong (ibid.: 6). The Hill Lalungs do not hesitate to call themselves Lalungs while their counterparts in the plains prefer to be called as Tiwas.

3.1. History and Migration

Except for occasional references in the old census reports and gazetteers, the British colonial rulers of Assam did not conduct any detailed study of the Tiwas. As a result, their study has to be based entirely on folk culture transmitted down the ages. According to the Hill Lalungs, the word ‘Lalung’ is derived from the compound lang-lu in Karbi which means ‘light blue water’. As the people left their original abode and took shelter besides the river Nilalung flowing through present Karbi Anglong district, they got the name Lalung (Gohain, op.cit.). The Hill Lalungs also hold that the word is derived from the word libing which, over the years, got phonetically changed to Lalung (libing meaning man). According to Bordoloi et al. (1987: 74-75), a popular myth prevalent among the Plains Lalungs runs that once the god Mahadeo was heavily intoxicated with rice beer and while he was lying unconscious, a stream of lal (saliva) came out of his mouth. Two human beings were created out of his saliva and they came...
to be known as the Lalungs (human beings created out of \textit{lal}). Another myth among the Lalungs of the plains runs that originally the Lalungs were ruled by the demon king Bali who was a faithful devotee of Lord Vishnu. The king wanted that all his subjects should adhere to the royal religion. A section of the Lalungs refused to accept the religion and as a result, the king's fury fell heavily upon them. As a punishment for their disobedience, they were compelled to bear a red imprint (\textit{lal}) on their foreheads and banished from the country. Later on, these bearers of the red mark on their foreheads came to be known as the Lalungs (Baruah, 1980:3).

Myths like these were also corroborated by the researcher during fieldwork in the Tiwa villages of Manipur I and Pumakuchi. In Pumakuchi village of Karbi Anglong district inhabited by the Hill Tiwas, the researcher was narrated a myth, according to which, the villagers attribute the creation of the universe and also of the first Tiwas to the benevolence of the supreme creator, Botolmaji or Mahadeo. Botolmaji, in their imagination is perceived to be endowed with a very fair complexion, wearing a \textit{phaka} (Tiwa headgear), \textit{pholo jotha} (wooden sandals) on his feet, and carrying a \textit{thokani} (stick) in his right hand.

The section of the tribe residing in the plains prefer to call themselves as Tiwa; in their opinion, the word Lalung has a negative connotation, used by the Karbis to address them in a derogatory manner. According to Gohain (\textit{op.cit.}), both the Hill Tiwas and those residing in the plains offer the same interpretation regarding the genesis of the term Tiwa. According to them, \textit{ti} means water, and \textit{wa} means superior. According to Bordoloi \textit{et al.} (\textit{op.cit.}) as the Lalungs landed on the plains following the course of the river Brahmaputra, they introduced themselves as Tiwa to the inquisitive non-Tiwas. They point out that it is quite probable that the word Tiwa derives its origin from the term 'Tibbatia' meaning people hailing from Tibet. In course of time, this 'Tibbatia' might have changed into Tiwa. The Hill Tiwas have another version regarding the origin of the word Tiwa. They believe that the word Tiwa has its origin in the words \textit{ti-phar-wali}, meaning 'a clan living near water'. Among the Hill Tiwas, \textit{wali} means a clan. \textit{Ti-phar-wali} became \textit{ti-wali}, meaning 'a tribe born out of water', and which later became Tiwa. They also believe that the first Lalung, Sotonga Raja, was born out of water, and hence the entire Lalung tribe is called Tiwa (Gohain, \textit{op.cit.}: 2).
There are several different interpretations regarding the first abode of the Tiwas on entering undivided Assam. Some claim that the Lalungs first resided in Joyta Khairam in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. In fact, the Hill Lalungs claim that the Laloo clan of the Jaintia Hill district of Meghalaya were originally Lalungs. Another interpretation offered by scholars is that Tribeg was the original abode of the Lalungs, which was located in the basin of the river Kapili and Kalang and according to the Hill Lalungs, the term *Tipper Wali* (people living near the river) which later became Tiwa signifies that the Lalungs were living in the basin of the river Kapili and Kalang and hence they are called Tiwa. Among the Tiwas of Nagaon district, the belief is very strong that their original abode was the Hillali kingdom, located somewhere in Sonitpur district of Assam.

There are, thus, different beliefs among the Tiwas residing in the hills and plains regarding their origins and history. However, according to Gohain (*op.cit.*), the undisputed fact remains that the Lalungs form a part of the great Indo-Mongoloid tribes who migrated from their original abode in Tibet and Western China to Assam long before the birth of Christ. There is also no doubt that they came in close contact with the powerful Dimasas and Jaintias and the clear impact of these contacts is discernible in the language and culture of the tribe.

The famous historian Gait assumed that they had migrated to the plains of Assam in the middle of the 17th century A.D. According to him, 'in 1658, Promota Rai rebelled against his grandfather Jasa Manta Rai, Raja of Jayantia and called on the tributary Tiwa chief of Gobha to help him. The latter refused and Promota Rai thereupon destroyed four of his villages. He appealed for help to the Kacharis who were coming to his assistance when the local Ahom officials intervened and said that, as the Ahoms were the paramount power, it was they whose protection should be sought. The Gobha chief accordingly went with seven hundred men to Jayadhwaj Singha and begged for help. Orders were issued to the Borphukan to establish him in Khagarijan corresponding more or less to modern Nagaon and this was accordingly done' (1963 reprint: 129).

Grierson in his *The Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III (1903: 49) states that in 1891, there were forty thousand Lalung speakers in Nagaon, Kamrup, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In his opinion, 'how the Lalungs came to the present site or when is not known, they are not mentioned by the Ahom historians or in the accounts of Koch kingdom.' He,
however, points out that ‘in Nagaon they are said to have a tradition that they came from the Jayantia Hills while some of the Lalungs in the latter district say that their ancestors immigrated thither in the reign of the Jayantia Raja U Mon Gohain’. Another legend goes that Tiwas, originally inhabiting the Jaintia Hills moved into the plains of Nagaon district (Khagarijan) because they disliked the matriarchal and matrilineal system and human sacrifice of the Jaintias. According to another tradition, the Tiwas were originally settled near Dimapur, but had to leave their abode to escape the humiliation of providing the Kachari Raja with human milk.

Thus, much mystery shrouds the early history, original abode and migration of the Tiwas. However, since the 1800s, we find them featured in the records of the British rulers. On 15th March, 1835, Lister with two companies of the Sylhet Light Infantry took possession of Jaintiapur as well as the Lalung principality of Gobha when the Jaintia king refused to give up the perpetrators of an outrage on four British subjects seized by the orders of Chatra Singh, the Lalung king of Gobha under instruction from his suzerain the Jaintia king. But the actual subjugation was not easy, with the hill people revolting. They were pacified on liberal terms, with no revenue being demanded of them and their affairs were left to themselves.

The Lalungs again featured in the records of the British Government when on December 18, 1861, Singer, an Assistant Commissioner of Nagaon district, met with his death when he along with some constables went to quell the rebellious Lalungs at Phulaguri in Nagaon district who protested against the orders of the British government prohibiting cultivation of poppy.

3.2. Habitat

In the plains, Tiwa concentrations are mainly found in the districts of Nagaon and Morigaon in Central Assam. They are spread in Morigaon, the Revenue Circles of Nagaon Sadar, Kaliabar, Lanka, Raha, and Kampur in Nagaon district, and the South Tribal Belt of Sonapur Revenue Circle in Kamrup district. They are found in the Dhemaji and Jorhat districts also, and some of them reside in the Nartiang Elaka of Jowai subdivision of Jaintia district of Meghalaya. The home of the Hill Lalungs is the district of Karbi Anglong of Assam, particularly the Amri Development Block, and a part of the
Chinthong Development Block of Hamren sub-division, and the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya. It is to be noted that topography and ecology of the plains and hills have influenced the Tiwas considerably so much so that certain aspects of the socio-cultural life of the Hill Lalungs became distinct from that of their plains counterparts. Thus, food habits, dress, housetype, agricultural pattern, etc. of the Hill Tiwas are conspicuously different from those of the Plains Tiwas.

3.3. Population

According to the 2001 census, the total population of the Tiwas is 1,70,622, constituting 5.16% of the total scheduled tribe population of Assam. The total number of males is 85,964, while the total number of females is 84,658. The percentage of literacy among the Tiwas, according to the 2001 census, is 51.53%. While the male literacy is 59.77%, the literacy rate among the females is 43.17%.

3.4. Physical Features

According to Bordoloi et al. (1987: 77), the Tiwas belong to the great Bodo race into which tribes like the Bodo Kachari, Chutiya, Deori, Rabha, Mech, Garo, etc. are included. The Tiwas, in their view, share similar physical features with them. The Tiwas are of medium stature, strong built and generally fair complexioned people, which are the characteristic features of the Mongoloids. They have flat nose, straight hair, wide faces with scanty beards and moustaches. According to Gohain (1993:1), in physical appearance the Hill Lalungs look like the Karbis of the Hills, though in respect of social framework, they are more akin to the Jaintias.

3.5. Material Culture

3.5.1. Village

The Tiwa villages of Nagaon, Morigaon, and other plains districts are not exclusive areas, being interspersed with non-Tiwa villages. Most of these villages can be approached by a well-organised road communication. In the plains districts of Nagaon and Morigaon, these villages are connected by roads maintained by the Public Works Department (P.W.D), with buses plying over these roads from the district headquarters.
and also from Guwahati. But there are Tiwa villages, which are far away from the bus point. The people of these villages depend upon bicycles and bullock-carts for transportation. The villages of the Hill Lalungs, on the other hand, are set up in clearings in the forest, with each such village having an area within which that particular village confines its shifting cultivation.

3.5.2. House Type

According to Sharma-Thakur (1985), the house type of the Tiwas of the plains resembles that of the Bodo Kacharis, a predominant plains tribe of Assam. They construct their houses on earthen plinths. Thatch is used for roofing, with the walls being made of reed and bamboo. Generally, bamboo posts are used in their houses, but the well-to-do sections use wooden posts. Of late, Assam type houses with C.I. sheet roofing and concrete houses are seen in the Tiwa villages. A traditional Tiwa house has a barghar with two rooms, one for the household deity, and the other for cooking purposes, a majghar with two or three rooms for sleeping purposes and a choraghar for entertaining guests. The granary is constructed towards the east. Those who do not possess a separate granary use a corner of the living room or choraghar for storing paddy.

According to Gohain (op.cit.), the houses of the Hill Lalungs are constructed on earthen platforms. Generally, there is a small verandah in front and inside, there are two large rooms. The front room is called nomaji, and the second room is called nukthi. In the front verandah are kept the loin-loom and the bamboo container for water. The nomaji is treated as the guest room and also the place where paddy is kept. The nukthi combines the functions of a living-room, kitchen as well as store-room. The construction materials used are bamboo and wood, with mud plastering on the bamboo walls.

Every Tiwa house, both in the hills and plains have a courtyard in front, which is used for threshing of paddy and other purposes.

3.5.3. Food and Drink

Rice is the staple food of the Tiwas of both the hills and the plains. Their two major meals normally consist of rice, vegetables, fish and eggs. Fowl and pork are their
main delicacies. Both the sections are fond of dried fish, which is eaten in various ways. The Hill Lalungs also consume fermented fish which is prepared by pounding dried fish and stuffing it in bamboo tubes kept air-tight for a month or so. The Tiwas traditionally do not drink milk, as it is believed that its properties clash with those of locally made rice beer (ju). Tea, earlier, used to be taken without milk though nowadays, many households have incorporated milk in their diet. Ju has traditionally been an essential item for them, without which no religious or social occasion could ever be complete. According to Gohain (op.cit: 23), he has seen with his own eyes two thirds of the rice being converted into rice beer in the houses of the Hill Lalungs. However, of late, in the plains, there has been a remarkable decline in this trend of consuming rice beer, especially among the educated people and those who have adopted Vaishnavism (who have also given up pork). In fact, the researcher could observe such a trend among both the Hill and the Plains Tiwas, especially among the educated youth, who have realized the ill effects of excess ju consumption on their economy and have tried to make the other villagers aware of this. Betel net is chewed many times during the day by the Tiwas with lime and betel leaf and which is also offered to the guests.

3.5.4. Implements and Utensils

The household utensils of the Tiwas are simple and limited. They consist mainly of cooking pots, large earthen vessels for preparing rice beer, the mortar and the pestle used for husking paddy. They also use bamboo baskets of different shapes and sizes and a few daoos (machete) and hoes. The Tiwas living in both the hills and plains use a number of implements for hunting, fishing, and for agriculture. Bow and arrow, machete and firearms are used for individual hunting. Fishing is very popular among the Tiwas of both the hills and plains. In the plains, community fishing is practiced mainly during the winters when the water in the streams and beels (horse-shoe lake created by changes in water channels and depressions) is scant. In fact, it is one of the highlights of the Jon Beel Mela. Groups of people go to the beel and construct artificial barriers with mud. Then the entire group of people suddenly jump over the barricaded water and catch the fish with the help of fishing implements like the palo and juluki (two types of fishing traps). During the summer season, fishing nets are used for individual fish catching in the rivers.
Bamboo traps like *chepa, dalanga, pacha* are also used in the paddy fields to catch the stray fish that emerge just after the first heavy showers. Among the Hill Tiwas, fishing is done with rod and line and by means of traps and baskets. They also use poison to stupefy the fishes in streams and rivers.

The *nangal* (plough) is the most widely used agricultural implement among the Tiwas, especially of the plains. It consists of a beam, a yoke and the body. They use a *juwali* (harrow) in their fields which looks like a ladder. The other agricultural implements of the Tiwas are the *kor* (spade), *fal* (share), *moi* (leveler), *jabaka* (yoke), *dalimari* (clodder), *kanchi* (sickle), etc. For dehusking paddy, they also use the *dheki*, like the caste Assamese people. The Hill Tiwas, besides wet rice cultivation, also practice shifting cultivation, for which the main implements used are the *khangra* (a versatile bush knife), *paku* (hoe), *khaji* (a dented sickle) and the *ruwa* (axe), etc.

3.5.5. Dress and Ornaments

The Tiwa women of the plains wear a dress similar to those worn by other rural Assamese women, composed of a *mekhela* (a petticoat like lower garment) and *chadar* (a piece of cloth worn as an upper garment). Tiwa women are experts in weaving, and they weave most of the clothes for both males and females. The dress of the Plains Tiwa males is similar to those worn by the caste Assamese men. Elderly men wear *dhotis* (loin cloth) while the younger generation of males prefers modern wear. The Tiwa males earlier used to wear shirts like the *nimai sola* and *thagla*, which are hardly worn today by the Tiwas living in the plains. The dresses of the Hill Lalungs, however, are different from those of their plains counterparts. According to Gohain (op.cit.), the Lalung male emulates his Jaintia counterpart because of the long association with them in the past. On his head, he wears a turban, and on his loins, a loin cloth or cotton *dhoti*. He wears a sleeveless striped jacket with long fringes. The women, on the other hand, wear an upper garment in the form of a *phaksai*. The lower garment has similarity with the Bodo skirt, which is generally brightly coloured and with a border of flowery design. The younger generation has shown a preference for modern clothes, in their day to day life.
The Tiwa kings or *rajas* have their own traditional dress, which they wear on specific occasions. The dress of the *raja* constitutes of a *dhoti* (loin cloth) made of Muga silk, a Muga *sola* (shirt), a Muga *phaguri* (turban), a cotton *chadar* (stole or a piece of cloth draped over the shoulders), a silver necklace, a pair of *gamkharu* (heavy traditional bracelet) and *siha* (ear-rings). Tiwa women wear scanty ornaments in the present day. Some elderly women wear silver, bead or stone necklaces and also a tubular ornament in their ear lobes, made of gold or silver. Earlier, women also used to wear the *muthikharu* (gold or silver bracelet), *sipatmani* (necklace), *gotakharu* (a kind of bracelet), *sen patia angathi* (a hawk like ring), but today, these are hardly worn. Here, it may be noted that Tiwa women, both from the hills and plains, are experts in the art of weaving; weaving clothes not only for the family but also to supplement the family income at times. They also know the methods and ingredients of indigenous dye making.

### 3.5.6. Musical Instruments

The Tiwas of both the plains and the hills are great lovers of music and dance, which constitute an indispensable part of their religious ceremonies and festivals. As such, they have a wide repertoire of musical instruments. There are three varieties of the *khram* (drum) which are *khrambar* (big drum), *pisu khram* (small drum) and the *khram* of average size. Flutes made of bamboo are used along with drums. *Kali* (pipe), *tandrang* (indigenous violin), *thogari* (a string instrument) are other musical instruments.

### 3.5.7. Weapons for War and Chase

According to Bordoloi *et al.* (*op.cit*.), in the olden days, the Tiwas might have excelled as blacksmiths, enough traces of which exist in Kamarkuchi, a village near Jagirroad. Cannons and swords were made in this village for the *rajas*. Bow and arrow, machete and firearms are used by the Tiwas for war and chase. Gohain (*op.cit.* also points out that the Tiwas are excellent archers and during the Ahom rule, they were used as such. The main weapons of the Hill Lalungs are the long knife, the spear, and the bow and arrow.

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3.5.8. Economy

The mainstay of the Tiwa economy, both in the hills and plains, is agriculture. The Hill Tiwas practice *jhum* (shifting) cultivation as well as wet paddy cultivation. It is believed that the Tiwas during their stay in the Jaintia Hills learnt *jhum* cultivation from their Jaintia neighbours. The Hill Tiwas continue to practice it, together with wet paddy cultivation, while the Tiwas who came down to the plains gave it up. The *jhum* cultivation practiced by the Hill Lalungs is very simple. A plot in the jungle is cleared in the dry months before the monsoon starts. The trees and shrubs are cut and the entire plot with the trees and shrubs is allowed to dry for a month or so. Just before the rains are expected, the plot is set on fire and the ash covered burnt soil is thoroughly hoed and the soil is mixed with the ash. Paddy as well as crops like maize, millet, cotton and vegetables are sowed in different plots, in holes dug up with a pointed stick and which are then covered. The early summer rain is instrumental for sprouting. Paddy is harvested between August and September, while maize and millets take about four months to mature. Vegetables like arum and sweet potato mature late in the monsoon.

Wet paddy is called *fadar* by the Hill Lalungs. Several varieties of wet paddy are grown by them, the more common ones are *pathisara, thingrimai, chingnimai, jogamai, maikhara, paramai, mikhirmai, choloukuthimai*, and *labramai*. In the cultivation of wet paddy, the Hill Lalungs generally do not use the plough. They use the *paku* (hoe) for preparing the soil which begins by the end of March and continues for about a month. The soil is thoroughly loosened by hoeing it repeatedly; then it is levelled with a harrow drawn either by a man or a buffalo. Seedlings are transplanted after the fields have been hoed, levelled and irrigated. Fields are kept irrigated till the plants take root and start growing. For growing wet paddy, generally a valley in between hillocks is selected. A river or a stream originating from the hillock is blocked at the foothills and the water is diverted to the fields of the valley by canals. The crop is ready to be harvested by December.

The Tiwas residing in the plains practice *sali* (rain-fed) paddy cultivation. They begin their agricultural operation in the month of April when the preliminary ploughing is done. The secondary ploughing is done in the month of May and simultaneously, seed beds are made ready for sowing. Generally sowing is done in the month of June and by
his duty to support his unmarried sister till her marriage. After the death of the father, one of the sons looks after the widowed mother. Among the Tiwas residing in the plains, the father is the authoritative head having an effective voice in all matters that concern the family. The younger ones have a respectful obedient attitude towards their elders, while the latter shower the younger ones with love and affection. Within the household, economic cooperation is maintained in the day to day life by the members. If the husband is busy in the fields, the wife does the household works like cooking, weaving, collecting firewood etc. The elders are assigned lighter duties like repairing a basket and looking after the young ones. The younger boys and girls also do small chores in the house.

The family composition is, however, quite different among the Hill Lalungs. According to Gohain (1993: 45), a typical Lalung family of the hills consists of parents, unmarried sons and daughters and a married daughter with her husband who stays in the house as a resident son-in-law, that is, gobhia and his children. Ideally, the youngest daughter stays with her husband in the house of her parents and inherits the parental house and a major share of parental landed property. The youngest daughter is called sadiya in the Lalung language. The sons after marriage go and stay in the parental houses of their wives. In case his wife is not the youngest daughter in the family, he constructs a new house in the land of his father-in-law. As a result of this system of having resident husbands, the sons of the family go to some other houses as gobhia and they do not inherit the paternal houses or lands. Thus, new households are created out of old households to accommodate the sons-in-law and not the sons of the family. In a Tiwa household of the hills, the husband is the head of the family. However, a male can become the head of the family only after marriage.

3.6.2. Clan

The Tiwas of the plains are divided into a number of exogamous patrilineal clans or kul. According to Sharma Thakur (1985: 66), originally, they had only twelve clans but later on these main clans have been sub-divided into a number of sub-clans called dhan bangah. Following Sharma Thakur (ibid.), these clans and sub-clans are as follows:
later part of July, the seedlings are ready to be transplanted to the fields. The crop begins to ripen between the months of November and December and is then harvested. Besides sali, the Tiwas of the plains also grow ahu and bao paddy (winter rice) in limited quantity. They also grow some quantities of sesame, mustard, arum, turmeric, ginger, and other vegetables.

Though the Tiwas of both the hills and plains are dependant on agriculture for livelihood, they also practice some amount of hunting, gathering, domestication and fishing to supplement their daily needs. Community hunting is fast disappearing though sometimes, individuals engage in secret hunting. Fishing, individual as well as community based, is practiced with great enthusiasm. Both the sections, living in the hills and plains, are accustomed to gathering a number of fruits, wild vegetables and tubers, honey etc. from their surroundings. This is generally a task assigned to women though males also engage in it. The Hill Tiwas generally domesticate pigs and fowl. The Tiwas of the plains, apart from pigs and fowl, also domesticate bullocks to harness their ploughs as well as cows, goats, buffaloes, etc. Though the economy still remains dominantly agrarian, in recent times, Tiwas, both in the hills and plains are seen engaging in service, running petty business and in various other professions.

3.6. Social Structure

3.6.1. Family and Household

A Tiwa family of the plains usually consists of father, mother, and their unmarried children. In other words, they have a nuclear or primary type of family which is, by and large, a universal human social grouping. According to Sharma Thakur (1983: 64), the Tiwa elementary family has a variable where a further generation of old father, old mother of the existing head of the family live together. This is called the lineal joint family. In such families, he observes that the unmarried brothers and sisters of the head of the family, that is, family of orientation also live together. Among the Tiwas residing in the plains, after the death of the father, the unmarried brother gets his share of the landed property which he cultivates jointly with his brothers. Sharma Thakur observes that the married brother ungrudgingly supports the younger brothers and also takes it as
The primary function of these clans and sub-clans is the regulation of marriage, in the sense that marriage between members of the same clan is strictly prohibited. A couple violating this rule of clan exogamy is excommunicated from the village. Every clan has its own deity which is worshipped by the clan members. Bordoloi et al. (op.cit.) that among the Tiwas of the plains, some kind of clan superiority is maintained, with some clans being considered superior to others, though, this does not create any social imbalance or vertical mobility among the people of various clans (1987: 88). According to Deka Pator (2007: 57), it is believed that the Melāng clan traces its origin to the Karbi tribe and hence, its social and religious rituals are considerably different from the other clans. The Macharang and Machereng are supposed to be superior to the other clans and the Tiwa King comes from these clans.

The Tiwas of the plains also have a khutā system of social grouping which can be called extension of a family. Following the genealogy, each family of a certain clan forms a social grouping called bangsa or khutā. The members of two or more such bangsa or khutā constitutes a khel, a social grouping which commands the highest significance in
the socio-religious life of the Tiwas. In a single village, there may be one or more than one clan. It may be noted that every family in a village must be affiliated to a *khutā* and correspondingly, to a *khel*. Whether solemnizing a marriage ceremony or observing a death rite, the *khutā* plays an important role in the family life of the Tiwas of the plains.

The most distinctive trait which differentiates the Tiwas residing in the plains from the Hill Lalungs is that the latter have matrilineal descent. Among the Hill Lalungs, the most important social grouping is the clan called *khul*. However, unlike the Tiwas of the plains, the *khul* of the Hill Lalungs is an exogamous matrilineal decent group, with children taking the clan of the mother and the clan tracing its descent from a female ancestress. According to Gohain (1993:56), Hill Lalung folklore speaks of twelve sisters born to a legendary family in the ancient times. The sisters grew up but could not find suitable matches. Out of frustration, they decided to jump into a river. The river-god, however, took pity on them and sent twelve men to marry these sisters. The Lalungs believe that all the different clans owe their origin to these twelve sisters.

All the clans among the Hill Lalungs are socially on equal footing and they eat together and intermarry. The clans are grouped into some clusters called *maharsa*. *Maharsa* is derived from two words, *ma* (meaning mother) and *harsa* meaning a female descendant who does not change residence after marriage. Thus, a *maharsa* means kin who consider themselves matrilineally consanguineous. One particular clan in each cluster is regarded as the principal or dominant clan but there is no special position of the clan in the said cluster and all are treated equally. According to Gohain (*op.cit.*: 41), the following clusters are found:

(i) Masluaiwali, Malangwali, Sagrawali, Agarwali, Tamlongwali, Samsolwali
(ii) Lumphuiwali, Khorarwali, Mithiwali, Madarwali
(iii) Hukaiwali, Malangwali, Khoraiwali
(iv) Pumawali, Phamjongwali
(v) Amsiwali, Amsongwali, Purongwali, Perphangwali
(vi) Tilarwali, Kolarwali, Madarwali
(vii) Jarphongwali
It may also be noted that every clan, both in the hills and the plains, has its own *barghar*, where socio-religious ceremonies specific to the clan members are performed. It is usually located in the house of the *bar zela* (head of the clan).

3.6.3. Kinship

Among the Tiwas of both the hills and the plains, both paternal and maternal kin receive the same status and respect. The mother’s brother takes much interest in the welfare of his sister’s children. Joking relationship exists between a man and his wife’s younger sister, while avoidance relationship exists between a man and his younger brother’s wife, to the extent that they do not take meals face to face and avoid uttering each other’s personal names. Avoidance is also practiced between a man and his wife’s elder sister, though not to such an extent.

With respect to the kinship terminology, it is observed that the Tiwa terms of reference are more in number than the terms of address. Father, mother, elder brother and elder sister are addressed and referred to by distinct kinship terms while son, daughter, brother (younger), sister (younger) are addressed by their personal names. Separate kinship terms are applied for referring to them. The husband and wife do not utter each other’s name but address each other technonymically. The Tiwa kinship system gives extensive recognition to age, with elder siblings terminologically differentiated from younger siblings. Persons of older generation are always regarded and denoted by distinct kin terms while the younger ones are addressed by their personal names. Sex differentiation is also maintained. Different terms are used to denote kins of different sexes who are related in the same way. Though descriptive, the use of certain classificatory kinship terminology cannot be overlooked. For instance, *magara ayung* is used to address both the father’s elder sister as well as the mother’s elder sister, while *ma-aa ayung* denotes both the father’s elder brother and the mother’s elder sister’s husband. It is noticed that the Tiwas do not confine their kinship terms within the limit of actual kin members; rather they are extended to outsiders also who may not belong to the community. Sometimes, Assamese equivalent terms are used to make the terminology more effective.
3.6.4. Marriage

Among the Tiwas of both the hills and the plains, marriage is the accepted form of union between a man and a woman. Illegal unions, especially incestuous relations, are very much hated and in no circumstances, social recognition is given to such a union. Marriages are solemnized after the attainment of puberty. Boys usually marry between the ages of 20 to 25 and girls between 16 to 22 years. Clan exogamy is strictly adhered to. Monogamy is the socially recognized type of marriage although polygyny cannot be ruled out. Preferential marriage including cross-cousin marriages are not in vogue. Levirate is not practiced while sororate is socially approved. There is no bar for a widow to remarry if she gets a widower. Cases of divorce are few and far between. A token bride price is paid.

According to Sharma Thakur (1985: 42), broadly, the Tiwas of the plains have four forms of marriage, which are:

(a) Bar Biya

The well to do and educated Tiwas prefer this form of marriage, which entails huge expenditure and long drawn formalities. The guardians of the prospective couple take the initiative, with zelas (experts in tribal folklore and traditions of the society) acting as the go between. Bar biya continues for three days. Two days before the marriage, the groom and the bride are ceremonially bathed in their respective houses. The marriage ritual is observed at the house of the bride on the third day. During the day, sumptuous feasts are arranged for the villagers in both the households. In the evening, the groom along with his friends and the zela proceeds to the bride’s house. The marriage procession is preceded by a bhar ((baskets at two ends of a carrying pole) which contains one stack of banana, one pot of milk, three pots of rice and some betel leaves and nuts. The elderly villagers gather at the girl’s house and bless the couple. An important part of the marriage ritual is the Kulsinga ceremony, whereby the girl’s ties with her father’s kul or bangsa are ceremonially severed off and she is given the status of a new member in her husband’s kul. Towards dawn, the newly wedded couple returns to the groom’s house.
(b) Joron Biya

This is an arranged marriage, but without the elaborate nature of the Bar Biya and is the preferred form of marriage among Tiwas who are not economically well off. When the parents of both the prospective groom and bride agree to the marriage, a date is set for the Joron ceremony. On this day, the groom’s party comprising of elderly relatives comes to the bride’s house with ornaments, dresses and three bhars (baskets full of eatables, including ju). The elderly people of the girl’s village bless the couple, who then proceed to the groom’s house, marking the completion of the marriage rituals.

(c) Paluai Ana Biya

Paluai ana biya or marriage by elopement is quite prevalent in the Tiwa society and holds no social stigma. A couple in love, unsure of their families’ reaction to such a union, often resort to such a marriage, with the boy taking away his beloved to his residence with the help of friends. Next day, two or three relatives of the boy go to inform the girl’s family members about the matter. Usually, the parents of the girl do not come in the way of this union if this is within the acceptable social norm. On the seventh day of the elopement, a small ceremony is observed in the barghar of the boy’s clan, with elderly male relatives and co-villages being invited. A party from the groom’s house consisting of two of his relatives and the zela goes to negotiate with the girl’s parents and finalise a date for the couple’s visit to the girl’s house. On the stipulated day, the couple along with some friends arrives at the girl’s house, bearing bhars containing ju, pitha (rice cakes), betel nut and leaf. The people of the girl’s village are entertained with the ju brought from the groom’s house and towards afternoon, the couple and their friends return to the boy’s house. After six months or one year, a ceremony called Bhar Singa is held in the girl’s house. A cock is sacrificed on this occasion and the girl’s father holds a feast.
The Tiwas, after coming down to the plains, became a patrilineal society. However, they seem to have retained a vestige of the old patriarchal system, in the form of the Gobhia system of marriage, whereby, the groom comes to reside in the girl’s house. Generally, parents having a lone daughter and no male issue prefer this form of marriage. There are very few formalities in this type of marriage, except for the holding of a community feast by the girl’s father. After the feast, the couple is taken inside the barghar of the girl’s clan and the elderly relatives bless the new couple. In such a marriage, Kulsinga ritual is not performed and a gobhia may retain his right to be cremated in the hatham (area earmarked for a particular clan in the burial/cremation ground) of his original clan, if his father’s clan members so agree.

According to Gohain (1993: 43), there are three ways of acquiring a wife in the Lalung society of the hills, which are as follows:

(a) Marriage through negotiation

In this kind of marriage, negotiations are done by the prospective groom and bride’s families, though consent of the couple is a must. The maternal uncle of the groom goes to the house of the bride bearing gifts of ju (rice beer) and betel nut and leaf to fix the date of marriage. On the appointed date, the groom along with his maternal uncle, other relatives and friends go to the girl’s house, where a simple ceremony takes place. The groom’s party is entertained with a sumptuous feast. The bride price is paid to the girl’s mother, when the girl is taken away to stay in the parental home of the bridegroom. The groom returns with the bride to his home by afternoon, where the maternal uncle or elder brother of the groom worships the clan gods and explains to the bride about the rituals of different clan gods.

(b) Marriage by mutual consent

This is the most preferred form of marriage among the Hill Tiwas. The boy and girl after long intimacy decide to get married and one night, the boy sleeps with the girl in
her house. The next day, the fact that the boy has married the girl and has become a resident son-in-law is made known to the villagers and the parents of the boy. The villagers and friends of the groom come to the bride’s house and they are entertained with ju. Thereafter, the couple resides in the parental house of the bride.

(c) Marriage by force

In such a case, the boy is taken by force by the young men of the girl’s village and forced to enter into wedlock with the girl and become a resident son-in-law in the girl’s house. This is usually resorted to when the young men of a girl’s village notice that a boy, despite being intimate with a girl, is not serious about marrying her. The boy accepts his fate and the parents of the boy are informed about the marriage.

3.7 Village Organisation

As already elaborated in Chapter I and also detailed in Chapter VI (dealing with the traditional administration), it is quite unnecessary to deal in detail with the village organization of the Tiwas at this stage. In summary, it may be stated that in both the hills and the plains, Tiwas have a secular as well as religious village organisation. That apart, there is also an overlapping of the traditional village organisation, the Panchayati Raj system and the jurisdiction of the Tiwa Autonomous District Council (to be dealt in detail in the later chapters). Tiwa administration is not confined to the village, but is in fact three-tiered at the top of which is the Tiwa king.

3.8. Religion

According to Sharma Thakur (1985), religion of the plains Tiwas may be regarded as one of the branches of the Hindu religion and while some of them have embraced the Vaishnava cult, most of them are followers of Shaivism. Lord Mahadeo is the presiding deity and all worships begin with a prayer to Lord Mahadeo. However, he observes that their method of worshipping is not the same as other non-Lalung Saktas. For the Hill Lalungs also, Mahadeo is the supreme god, whom they refer to as Botolmaji. Their deities need to be propitiated through offerings and sacrifices; no deity of the Tiwa
pantheon can ever be satisfied without the offering of ju. Fowls, pigs and goats are sacrificed. Thans (centre of religious worship, associated with the traditional religion, usually surrounded by a patch of forest) are established in each village or a group of villages. Public worships are performed here, where the deori (traditional priest) presides. There may be separate thans for separate deities (especially in the hills). In many Tiwa villages of the plains, which have come within the fold of Vaishnavism, namghars (village level community worshipping house of the Assamese Vaishnavites) have replaced thans, where sacrifices of animals are not allowed. At present, there are two broad religious divisions among them— the traditionalists and the Vaishnavites.

3.8.1. Gods and Deities

The Tiwas traditionally believe in innumerable supernatural powers, both benevolent and malevolent; these powers may be broadly classified into three categories— mindei (deity), mathine (spirit) and khetar (ghosts) (based on the data collected in the field by the researcher). The people believe in personified supernatural powers creating mindei in the image of man, all of whom are individually known, named and personalized and are recognizable by their given attributes. As already mentioned, the Tiwas of both the Hills and Plains revere Mahadeo or Botolmaji as the supreme creator. Besides Mahadeo, the Plains Tiwas worship other male deities like Ganesh, Parameswar, Badarmaji, Baolakong and female deities like Aai Gosani, Lakhimi, Kalika, Saru Aai, Bor Aai etc. Pala Konwar, Moramuji, Rungshu Konwari, Sumai Mora are the main deities of the Hill Lalungs. They also worship Lukhumi (Goddess Lakshmi) and according to Gohain (1993: 61), earlier, they used to offer human sacrifices before Lukhumi. The Tiwas believe in mathine, both benevolent and malevolent, who intervene in everyday human affairs such as the growing of crops, health, and other matters directly concerning human welfare. They are placed below the rank of mindei. Khetars are believed to be the souls of the dead, which return to the living to do harm. Every clan of the Tiwas has its own specific clan deities which are propitiated by the clan members for the protection and welfare of the whole clan. In both the hills and the plains, the Tiwas hold in great reverence the ancestral spirits. They perform annual rituals to bring back the
spirits of the deceased into the community and to reinforce the connections between the dead and the living.

3.8.2. Crisis Rites

As a Tiwa individual goes through his life-cycle from birth to death, a number of crisis rites are performed: these being birth rites, rites associated with marriage (already dealt with) and death rites. Usually, no rites are observed on a girl attaining puberty though some Tiwas, living in close contact with the caste Assamese population, have started adopting these.

3.8.2.1. Birth Rites

Among the Tiwas residing in the plains and hills, an expectant mother is helped by the mid-wife and two-three female helpers from the village in delivering the child. After the birth, the mother takes rest in a bed of dried paddy stalks known as *suti*. According to Sharma Thakur (1985: 36), among the Tiwas of the Plains, there are certain taboos which the mother of the newborn child must observe. For example, if she rises placing her weight on the hand over the earth, she is supposed to suffer from abdominal disorder, which the plains Tiwas call *adala kamora*. The newborn baby is laid on a banana leaf and the mother washes him or her with tepid water. The umbilical cord is placed in a deep pit dug at a considerable distance from the house where the delivery took place. It is believed that if the umbilical cord is placed at a considerable distance, then the mother's child bearing capacity increases. Till the naval cord has fallen off, the mother is not supposed to sleep with her back to the child.

After the naval cord has fallen, the name giving ceremony is observed. Among the Tiwas of the plains, the impurity arising out of birth is known as *kecha sua*. The period extends from the date of birth till the date of Aaus Gara or name-giving ceremony. During this period, the clan members observe certain taboos. They do not take out paddy from the granary. No ceremony can be observed during this period nor can any member of the clan enter the barghar (place of religious worship of individual clans, locally usually in the *bar zela's* (head of the clan) house). On the day of the Aaus Gara.
ceremony, the bar zela sacrifices a cock and worships the deities, after which the hair of the child is shaved. The Plain Tiwas observe a second name giving ceremony after one year or so when there are more new born babies in the clan. This second ceremony is a community affair which is held in the barghar of the clan. Fowl is sacrificed by the bar zela in the barghar and it is customary to divine the future of the babies by observing the manner of death of the sacrificed birds. On the other hand, according to Gohain, there is no ceremony associated with child-birth among the Hill Tiwas. There is no purificatory ceremony as the mother is not treated as unclean after parturition and she is not confined in her room. Among the Hill Tiwas, the name-giving ceremony is observed in the presence of the bar zelas of different clans. Twelve pairs of fowl are sacrificed in case the child is a male and six pairs for a female child. Generally, the Hill Lalungs name a child after the grandparents or dead kin.

3.8.2.2c Death Rites

Among the Tiwas, both cremation and burial are practiced, though in recent times, particularly among those residing in the plains, cremation is preferred. The cremation/ burial ground is known as the mangkhor, within which there are exclusive areas for each clan known as hatham. News of a death is circulated among the various clan members of different villages. The giyati (religious specialist, who performs an important role in the death rites) both male and female, belonging to different clans arrive, who have to perform important roles in the death ceremonies. As the dead body is readied for the last rites and food for the deceased is cooked and offered by a female giyati, the elderly members of various clans congregate in the courtyard of the deceased. The giyati takes all the responsibility for the cremation rites; each khuta selects one giyati for performing the cremation rites and at the time of need, he has to be formally invited. The giyati mel entrusts the giyati with the duty to perform the death rites. One or two members of each khuta proceed to the cremation ground with bamboos and firewood. As soon as the construction of the pyre is completed, the giyati informs the villagers to bring the dead body to the mangkhor. The dead body is carried to the mangkhor on a bamboo bier made with seven long bamboo pieces. The female giyati accompanies the
procession carrying the remaining portion of the cooked food along with uncooked rice offered by the co-villagers and relatives, which is left at the mangkhor. At the cremation ground, the body is placed on the already constructed pyre and the giyati first applies fire over the face of the dead body. After the giyati, others may apply fire on the face of the dead body. In the case of burial, a spacious hole, about seven or nine feet long, five feet deep and two to three feet wide, is dug where some leaves and grass are placed. The dead body is placed in this hole keeping the head in the north east direction.

The Tiwas, both in the hills and plains, believe in the existence of evil spirits and, therefore, take precautions particularly when they return from the cremation ground. On reaching the village, a few elderly members of the khuta prepare a mixture of water, tulsi (basil) leaves, durba grass and cowdung in a pot and sprinkle the mixture over the persons. A fire is lit at the entrance of the village and the participants of the funeral procession jump over it. It is believed that evil spirits cannot jump over the fire. The participants take bath and before entering their respective homes, they again purify themselves by sprinkling holy water on themselves. After some time, the giyati and all other persons who attended the cremation gather at the courtyard of the family of the deceased. The heir of the deceased keeps one pot of pahan mad (rice beer prepared exclusively for this occasion), some salt, betel leaf and nut, some clothes and ornaments on a banana leaf and the same are distributed to the male and female giyati. The pahan mad is offered to all assembled here.

Among the plains Tiwas, on the 3rd or 7th day after the death, the giyati are invited for a small feast, following which the first part of the purificatory ceremony comes to an end. The main death ceremony or Karam is solemnized jointly by the bangsa and this may be kept pending for five or six years as it is an expensive affair. When the decision to perform this ceremony is taken, all the members of the clan as well as members of other clans are informed at least ten or fifteen days in advance. All the families of the bangsa have to contribute to the common fund of the Karam. Formerly, Karam was a seven day function but nowadays, it is held on one day or three days. Earlier, five pigs were essential for this ceremony but nowadays, Karam is observed with one pig and five fowls only. The pig is sacrificed ceremonially and offerings of cooked food are left at the mangkhhor. Then all the villagers partake of the community feast. The giyatis are
honoured for their services, both in cash and kind. The ceremony comes to an end with the *Sumsira Pansira* ceremony. Here, each of the elderly members assembled is given a piece of betel nut and one betel leaf on a banana leaf. The betel leaf is torn into pieces and the nut is thrown away. It is believed that the spirit of the deceased do not disturb the members of the family once this ritual is completed. Gohain does not find similar death ceremonies among the Hill Lalungs; according to him (1993: 50), no feast is given on the occasion of the death ceremony, nor is a priest engaged for the ceremony. However, Gohain mentions that they observe the *Phidri Jongkhong* ceremony annually for the whole village for making offerings to the dead so that no harm is caused to the living.

### 3.8.3. Annual and Occasional Rites

The Tiwas of both the hills and plains observe a number of rites and rituals to appease various deities throughout the year. The *bangsa* observes a number of community rituals in a year, chief among them being *Deo-Sewa, Kalika Puja, Jangkhang Puja, Sani Puja, Rati Sewa* etc. *Deo-Sewa* is normally observed in *Kati-Aghon* (October-November) when the first betel nuts of the season are ready for offering to the deities. It is observed in order to make the villagers self-sufficient for the year. *Kalika* is worshipped in order to get an increased yield of the crop as well as to improve the health of the people. The ritual to propitiate this deity is observed in the month of *Kati* (October-November). Among the Tiwas of the Plains, every *khuta* observes *Bhakat Sewa* in the month of *Aghon* (December-January), when prayers and offerings are made to the presiding deities of the *bangsa*. Some Tiwas, known as the Pachorajia Lalungs, perform *Ai Bhagawati* worship during the month of *Jeth* (May-June) every year. The womenfolk make a raft with banana stems, on which they make offerings of *mah prasad* (ceremonial offering of soaked gram, pigeon peas, banana etc.) and set it adrift on a river.

Besides the *bangsa* or *khuta* worships, the entire village observes certain rituals during a year. Such community rituals are observed to propitiate the *than* deities, with such *thans* being established in a village or common to a cluster of villages. The Tiwas consider the Mahadeosal Than and Basundhari Than of Sahari Mauza of Nagaon district very sacred, where annual rituals are held. The Tiwas also perform various other
community rituals such as Jangkhang Puja, Sani Puja, Hogora Puja etc. Jangkhang Puja is now observed mainly by the Hill Lalungs. It is an annual puja where goddess Lakshmi is worshipped. Sani Puja is observed in the month of Jeth (May-June) outside the village to scare away evil spirits from the village. Hogora Puja is mainly observed by the Tiwas living in the foothill areas such as Kathiatali, Kandali, Deosal and Manipur as an annual religious festival in the samadi (bachelors’ dormitory). The ritual is observed for the well-being of the crops and the same is concluded by planting trees. Sharma Thakur (1985) observes that with samadis fast disappearing in the plains, Hogora Puja is no longer being observed in the plains.

Besides the annual rites and rituals, the Tiwas of both the hills and plains perform a number of occasional rites. One of them is the Mal Puja observed once in every two or three years, during the month of Jeth (May-June), to offer protection against epidemics and other calamities. Rati Sewa is another important ritual which is observed half yearly or annually for the general welfare of the villagers. But as per demands of individual households, it may be observed several times in a year. Usually, when there is any serious illness in a family, the head of the household promises to offer one pig or fowl at the Rati Sewa. Sani or the god Saturn is worshipped among both sections of the Tiwas. Among the Hill Tiwas, Saturn is worshipped wherever blood shed, accidents takes place. The Hill Lalungs observe the Yangli Puja once in every three years.

3.8.4. Fairs and Festivals

For the Tiwas of both the hills and plains, the most important festivals are the three Bihu, Sagra Misawa, Jon Beel Mela etc. The three Bihu, Bohag Bihu (festival of merry-making), Magh Bihu (festival of feasting) and the Kati Bihu (festival of worshipping), which are the state festivals of Assam, are celebrated by the Tiwas as Bisu. Baisak Bisu (Bohag Bihu) is observed as a festival of merrymaking and dance during the month of April. During this festival, worship is offered to a number of deities for plentiful crops and well-being of the villagers for the coming year. Both community and household rituals are observed. Among the Tiwas of Gobha, Nellie, Khola and Sohari, the Bisu is concluded with a ceremony known as Bheti Karha, where villagers go to offer rice cakes, cotton, turmeric, chillies, raw and dried fish, and bamboo shoots etc. to the

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Raja (Tiwa king), as token of their respect and love for him. The Hill Lalungs conclude their Bisu with young boys and girls singing and dancing in a muddy place, which is known as Boka Nas. Among the Tiwas of the plains who have embraced Vaishnavism, they conclude Bohag Bisu with a ceremony known as Gosain Uliwa Utsav, where the image of Lord Vishnu, in the village namghar is ceremonially brought out and namkirtan (Vaishnavite devotional songs) are performed.

Magh Bisu is observed by the Tiwas as a harvest festival during the month of Magh (January-February). Construction of meji (heap of firewood) and belaghar (improvised shed of paddy stalks or dry banana leaves) is completed two to three weeks in advance. On the eve of Bisu, the young boys spend the night at the belaghar by lighting bonfires and singing and dancing. At dawn, in the presence of all the villagers, the mejis are lit. On the day of Bisu, people worship their household deities and ancestors by offering rice cakes, ju and other items at the barghar.

The most attractive feature of the Tiwa Magh Bisu is the Jon Beel Mela, where Tiwas from both the hills and plains convene annually for about three days. The mela (fair) gets its name from the beel (ox-bow lake created by changes in the water channels and depressions) which looks like a crescent moon, on the banks of which it is held. The beel is situated about three kilometers north-east of Jagiroad. The Tiwas, Karbis and Jayantias of the Hills bring with them agricultural and other items for bartering in the fair. Hard currency or cash is supposed to be a taboo here. The Tiwa king of Gobha comes to the fair on an elephant in a ceremonial procession and receives tributes in the form of agricultural and other produce from the people. At the end of the mela, the fishermen of both the hills and the plains start mass fishing in the beel. A portion of the fish caught here is offered to the king.

Sagra Misawa is an important spring dance festival of the Tiwas, held in the month of Fagun (February-March). The samadi forms the nucleus for this dance sequence. Before the festival starts, the Langkhun phuja is held in the month of Kati (October- November); following which only the Sagra Misawa festival can take place. Masks are used by the dancers, who are called nartaks (all of them being males). On the day of the commencement of the festival, dancing continues for the whole day and after dancing in three households, the party takes rest for the night in that household where
evening sets in. The party performs the Sagra dance in the households of twelve respectable persons extending for a period of three days and three nights. On the third day, the party returns to the samadi and removes their festive dresses. A vigil is kept on these by the village youths for seven days, at the completion of which certain rituals are held and the masks are removed and placed on the branches of a tree. The end of the festival is marked by a big community feast, in which all villagers take part. At present, this festival is observed in the Mindaimari, Amri, Kathiatali, Nelli, Ampanai, Umswang, Bormarjong of Nagaon and Karbi Anglong districts.